

Moving from a tradition of isolation to a culture of collaboration

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Some faculty and staff may undoubtedly have a difficult time moving from a culture of isolation into learning communities. How may other faculty and staff help these professionals make that transition and understand their role as a collaborator and its importance?

Let's begin with the following assumptions: 1) All staff members have been organized into a series of collaborative teams, focused on student learning, and 2) Time and support for collaboration are being provided to each team by the administration. Some teams, however, are discovering some of their members are reluctant to collaborate for any number of reasons (i.e., not wanting to share their hard work, ideas, and/or materials; being fearful their ideas will be criticized by their colleagues; not convinced collaboration will actually enhance their teaching and ultimately student achievement; or simply not getting along well with their teammates).

Here are several steps these teams can take to help colleagues who are experiencing difficulty:

1. Establish team norms. In PLCs norms represent the protocols and commitments developed by each team to guide members in working together. Norms help team members clarify expectations regarding how they will work together to achieve their shared goals. Daniel Goleman states norms are ground rules or habits that govern a group (Goleman, 2002, p. 173) and that establishing explicitly stated norms is an essential first step in getting off to a good start and in transforming a group into a team (i.e., we will begin and end our meetings on time, we will each contribute to team dialogue, we will share equally in the workload, we will listen respectfully, etc.).
2. Identify and pursue a common SMART (Strategic and Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, Time-bound) goal. The very definition of a team in a PLC is a group of people working *interdependently* to achieve a *common goal*, for which members are held *mutually accountable*. Katzenbach and Smith's research found that establishing the right goals are the most powerful tools to help people begin to come together as a team.
3. Become skillful in having *crucial conversations*. Kerry Patterson, et al. (2002) offer some very helpful tips in *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes are High*. This book could provide some strategies for members of the teams to use when they experience difficulty with the team process.
4. Become skillful in Howard Gardner's seven strategies for changing someone's mind (including your own)
 - a. Reason-Appealing to rational thinking and decision making
 - b. Research-Building shared knowledge of the research base supporting a position

- c. Resonance-Connecting to the person's intuition so that the proposal "feels right"
- d. Representational Re-descriptions-Changing the way the information is presented (for example, using stories or analogies instead of data)
- e. Resources and Reward-Providing people with incentives to embrace an idea
- f. Real World Events-Presenting real-world examples where the idea has been applied successfully
- g. Confrontation*

*In the early stages of working in teams in a PLC, there will likely be times when a staff member(s) remains reluctant to contribute to the team process regardless of how skillful the members are in the art of persuasion. At those critical junctures, the principal must be willing to direct the team process. The hope is that the reluctant team members will ultimately experience the benefits of collaboration and will no longer need to be convinced.

We have learned one of the best ways to help people believe in the power of collaboration is to put them into the team setting and then provide all members with time, support, resources, and just-in-time training when they experience difficulty. Therefore, we have devoted multiple chapters to building and supporting strong collaborative teams in our book *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work™* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006).

Reference List

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., and Many, T. (2006). *Learning ByDoing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution-Tree.

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